



# REPORTS & COMMENT

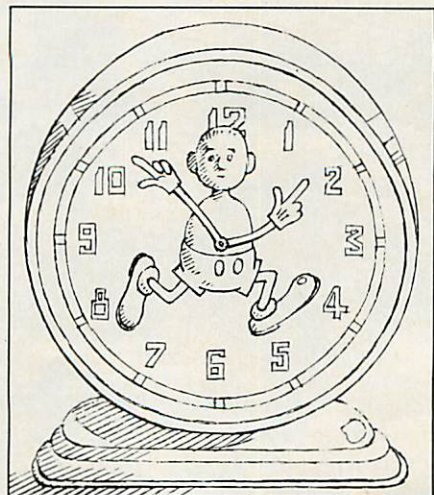
## NOTES

### PFFT

**I**N MY MIND I am seventeen, although in actual fact—in man-years—I am older. When I go to pick up baby-sitters, I think of them as young contemporaries, the way eleventh-graders think of ninth-graders. They, in contrast, think of me as a crumbling historical specimen. “I wish my dad would ever wear a jacket like that,” one of them said not long ago. She didn’t mean (it turned out) that she thought I looked sharp; she meant that she wished her father would stop trying to dress so youthfully.

A couple of years ago in New York, I was walking down Seventieth Street wearing blue jeans, sneakers, and an old sweatshirt. Two boys in their late teens were playing football on the sidewalk. The ball got away from them and rolled to my feet. I bent to pick it up and toss it back. One of the boys said, “I’ll get that, sir.”

I am so used to being thought of as a



member of the Young Generation that the idea of becoming a member of the Old Generation is pretty hard to accept. This feeling seems to be widely shared. Lately I have noticed that people my age usually teach their children to address grown-ups by their first names. I am Dave or Davey to my daughter’s friends, not Mr. Owen. This may be just a change of fashion, like the day in 1964 when my father and every other man in America stopped wearing a hat. But I think it’s something else. Some of my friends don’t even like to be called Mom or Dad. I can understand this. When my daughter calls me Dave, as she does occasionally, I am as thrilled as I was when I went to the front door recently and a salesman asked, “Are your parents home?”

My daughter turned two not long ago. I said to her, “Here’s how old you are: One, two. Now here’s how old Daddy is: One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen (pause), eighteen, nineteen, twenty, twenty-one, twenty-two, twenty-three, twenty-four, twenty-five, twenty-six, twenty-seven, twenty-eight, twenty-nine, thirty, thirty-one.” This made me feel depressed. To make myself feel better, I told her how old Grandpa is.

When my daughter was born, one of her great-grandfathers said, “I don’t mind being a great-grandfather, but I can’t stand being the father of a grandfather.”

When I was twenty-one, I asked my father, who was fifty-one at the time, how old he felt. “Not very,” he said. I asked, “How long ago does it seem since you were my age?” He thought for a moment, and then waved his hand and said, “Pfft.”

—David Owen



## LANGUAGE

### ESPERANTO LIVES

Hundon mordas viro,  
*“Man bites dog,” might be the motto of this artificial language, which incarnates an impossible, yet democratic, dream*

**I**T’S TEMPTING TO laugh at the Esperantists, and during the two weeks that I spent with 2,200 of them in China, for the International Esperanto Congress, I periodically succumbed. Their dream of world brotherhood through a planned international language is so touchingly unrealistic; the proportion of oddballs among them is so high. On the flight into Beijing my children tried to amuse themselves by picking out Esperantists among the passengers. But the game soon lost any sense of challenge. In the row behind us, for example, seat A held a Japanese salaryman, B another salaryman, and C a ninety-year-old American with beret, backpack, dazed